

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC EDUCATION

Hearing Date: March 2, 2021 8:00 AM

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COMMENTS FOR: Commissioner of Education

Linda Kellogg

National Motto Project

Richwood, TX

HB 1218 doesn't appear on your agenda for tomorrow's hearing, so I assume it will be considered by your committee at your next conference. This bill offers an amendment to Education Code 1.004 which clarifies that the posters or framed prints will be provided by donations, and it also specifies the appearance of the display. This National Motto has been part of our American history and heritage since "In God We Trust" first appeared on coinage during the Civil War, and as you probably know, It was after World War II that the United States Congress voted unanimously to make this phrase the National Motto. HB1218 is a simple, well written bill which won't add a cent to our budget. Please allow it to pass to the floor for a vote. Thank you.

Julia Grizzard, Executive Director

Bexar County Education Coalition

SAN ANTONIO, TX

Bexar County Education Coalition (BCEC) members represent approximately 360,000 students, 63% of whom are economically disadvantaged, and lead suburban, urban, fast-growth, recapture, military, and rural independent school districts ranging in enrollment sizes from 1,000 to 100,000 students. BCEC supports legislation and policies that: create sustainable solutions to keep education funding in line with the on-going costs of a robust public education system; develop an accountability system that accurately portrays the whole child, removes high-stakes punitive measures on students, and focuses on the input of adults; and move our state toward closing the digital divide for all students. We look forward to working with each member of the committee to share our perspective on the best way for the state to recover and have summarized our top concerns in these comments. We hope in the days ahead this committee can encourage The Texas Education Agency to use The Elementary and Secondary Education Emergency Relief II (ESSER) funds as soon as possible to fund critical COVID-19 remediation efforts for our students as well as fully reimburse unanticipated expenses that public schools across Texas incurred due to COVID-19. Additionally, to ensure school districts have stable funding, we believe Average Daily Attendance (ADA) hold harmless funding protections should be extended to the end of the 2020-2021 school year. As this pandemic has demonstrated, ADA is not a clear picture of how many students are truly being served by public schools; BCEC believes alternatives to ADA should be explored via a task force to ensure schools are not disproportionately penalized for serving at-risk students and have access to adequate resources to assure students attend. We believe this committee would agree that no child should be prevented from taking the next step in their educational career due to the pandemic, therefore the class of 2021 graduating seniors should be given testing flexibility, similarly extended to 2020 graduating seniors. We hope this committee will utilize the pause in accountability scores to adjust the current accountability system to reflect the comprehensive performance and progress of students as well as rewards schools for implementing vital whole-child and wrap-around resources. For our campuses that continue to struggle, we hope that the legislature will continue to differentiate treatment, support, and procedures for campus ratings of D's and F's. As the last year has demonstrated, access to high-speed internet is essential for families across Texas, BCEC believes that the state should make significant investments full close the digital divide; and instructional materials support should reflect current needs of schools, including funding for student devices and internet connectivity. We look forward to partnering with this committee on the critical work that lies ahead. Thank you for your continued service to our state and to our schools.

David Feigen, Policy Associate

Texans Care for Children

Austin, TX

We appreciate the Legislature's commitment to fully fund the education funding components of House Bill 3 (2019), including its support for full-day prekindergarten, dual language immersion, and other strategies centered on helping children become strong readers by third grade. However, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has led to lost learning opportunities that could derail Texas children's educational trajectories without sufficient action this session.

Full-day, high-quality pre-k is the best way for children to be kindergarten-ready and strong readers by third grade. The newly created Early Education Allotment provides districts the opportunity to improve and expand their pre-k programs. However, not all families are seeing the benefit of these changes. With over 100 school districts waiving the requirement to offer full-day pre-k for up to three years and COVID-19 leading to a statewide pre-k enrollment decline of 22 percent, legislators and the Texas Education Agency must ensure districts are doing everything possible to ramp up high-quality, full-day pre-k programs for all eligible 4-year olds. The Legislature should ensure districts that need support with space or expertise are considering partnerships with high-quality child care programs. The Committee should also ensure the Early Education Allotment continues to support the expansion to full-day pre-k and that districts have other resources to meet their goals in other grades.

Additionally, the Committee should consider strategies to improve the high-quality pre-k standards required in HB 3. The top priority should be setting a maximum class size of 22 students and a student-teacher ratio of no more than 11:1. While state law sets a limit of 22 students for kindergarten through fourth grade, there is no such requirement for pre-k. A 2016 report commissioned by the TEA recommended a maximum of 22 students and no more than 11 students for each teacher or aide in a classroom with more than 15 students. Effective teacher-child interactions are only feasible with smaller, manageable class sizes.

The Committee should also consider strategies to help English Learners (ELs) become strong readers by third grade, become fluent and literate in both English and their home language, and are learning in settings where educators, principals, and parents have the tools they need to support them. Texas schools serve the greatest proportion of ELs in the U.S., including 28 percent of the state's pre-k through 3rd-grade enrollment. The Legislature should strengthen educator preparation, student progress monitoring, and family engagement practices. Furthermore, the Committee should support a state strategic plan to set benchmarks and guide action for future sessions to address this critical issue.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments. We look forward to working with you this session.

Viviana Killion, Director for Governmental Relations

Galena Park Independent School District

Houston, TX

Can you please indicate where the public can access the slides Commissioner Morath reviewed with the Public Education Committee during the Public Hearing on March 2, 2021 at 8 a.m.? This is valuable information for public school districts.

Josette Saxton, Director of Mental Health Policy

Texans Care for Children

Austin, TX

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the need for a holistic approach to student learning. Job loss and lower incomes have led to millions of Texas families experiencing food insecurity, housing challenges, and poverty. Children are grieving the deaths of parents and grandparents. Increases in mental health concerns and thoughts of suicide among children and adults have been reported, along with concerns over heightened risks for abuse within households.

These challenges affect more than a child's well-being; they directly affect their ability to learn. Children struggling with distress, anxiety, grief, or depression have more difficulty concentrating on their schoolwork, are less likely to persist when facing a

challenge, and are less likely to be successful in school. Decades of research have shown exposure to multiple or on-going challenges can cause physiological changes in children's brains and bodies that negatively affect learning, behavior, and physical/mental health well into adulthood. This means that students can continue to feel the negative effects of the pandemic even after the pandemic has ended. Academic interventions alone will not be successful in addressing non-academic barriers that stem from social, emotional, and behavioral aspects of learning.

Now more than ever, students need to return to campuses and classrooms that use a continuum of evidence-based strategies to provide students with:

1. Safe, supportive, and positive learning environments/climates that use trauma-informed practices
2. Opportunities to develop social-emotional skills to help them meet the demands of school, home, and life - even as they face adversity
3. Additional supports for students who have more intensive social, emotional, behavioral, and/or academic needs.

This multi-tiered holistic approach is especially effective in improving outcomes of populations identified as educationally at-risk. This includes students living in poverty, students of color, students with a history of trauma, and those with mental health concerns. It also provides a valuable framework to assist districts in using holistic strategies to re-engage students and families who have not returned to school.

The House Public Education Committee can promote a holistic learning approach by advancing legislation that supports the use of the following evidence-based strategies:

- Social-emotional learning
- Positive and restorative discipline
- Connecting students and families with mental health services and supports when needed
- School-wide suicide prevention
- Data collection and analysis of indicators related to school climate and the availability of mental health services and supports

Please feel free to contact me with any questions. I look forward to working with your offices this session.

Steven Aleman, Senior Policy Specialist

Disability Rights Texas

Austin, TX

To: House Public Education Committee
From: Disability Rights Texas
Re: Public Comment for March 2, 2021 Hearing

For the 87th Legislature, Disability Rights Texas notes that there are significant issues in Texas public schools for students with disabilities. The COVID-19 pandemic, along with persistent systemic issues, challenge students receiving special education services. Disability Rights Texas recommends that the Public Education Committee prioritize the needs of students with disabilities. Among other things, the Committee should review and consider the final report of the Special Education Allotment Advisory Committee. In 2020, the Special Education Allotment Advisory Committee studied the state special education finance system. The final report includes a range of policy recommendations. Without a fundamentally sound funding system, schools will continue to struggle to deliver special education services. The final report of the Special Education Allotment Advisory Committee is available on the website of the Texas Education Agency.

<https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/government-relations-and-legal/government-relations/special-education-allotment-committee>

<https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/2020-SPED-Allotment-Advisory-Committee-Report-R2.pdf>

Chris Masey

Autism Society of Texas

austin, TX

Please consider special education as a priority this Session. SPED needs your attention and care. Parents and advocates are concerned about SPED in normal instances but with COVID-19 - everything is very difficult. We believe that compensatory services are important and necessary to replace educational loss this year and we also believe that Texas should spend the MFS funds on helping our children; rather than just maintaining a placeholder in the budget pending the federal negotiations. There should not be additional negotiations with the Federal government. Please consider using the funds to help our children as they deserve. We feel it is a moral imperative that Texas has not met.
